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THE
C A S E
O F
A B R A H A M's
Being Commanded by
G O D A L M I G H T Y
To Offer up
His Son I S A A C
In S A C R I F I C E,

Impartially Examined and Defended, against
the Deists and other modern Infidels.

By the late Reverend and Learned
P. MIDDLETON, D. D.

The S E C O N D EDITION.

L O N D O N :

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E R R A T A.

PAGE 6. Line 13. place a Period before *When*. p. 13. l. 27.
r. to do it with *Candour and Clearness*. p. 18. l. 24.
r. aggravated it by. p. 24. l. 6. r. *People whose Loss of Life*
they can never recompense. p. 31. l. 24. for *Safety*, r. *Peace*.
p. 34. l. 11. for *united*, r. *unite*. *ibid*. l. 26. *after Genera-*
tions; but also. p. 58. l. 6. for *offer*, r. *after*. p. 59. l. 22.
for *vious*, r. *previous*. p. 60. l. 16. put a Comma before *di-*
rectly. p. 63. l. 17. for *their*, r. *this*, p. 67. l. 5. r. *in it*.
p. 69. l. 17. for *Captivity*, r. *Capacity*.





Genesis xxii. from the Beginning to Verse 12th.

*And it came to pass, after these Things
(viz. after a long Tract of pious
Conduct, and habitual Divine Re-
velation, as in the Ten foregoing
Chapters) that God did tempt (or try)
Abraham — Take now thy Son,
thine only Son Isaac, whom thou
lovest — And offer him there,
for a Burnt-Offering —*

HIS Portion of Scripture is much insisted on, by the modern Advocates of Infidelity. The Question is, How the Command of God, and the Conformity of *Abraham*, can be vindicated? *i. e.* How they can consist with moral Equity, or the Duty and natural Affection of a Parent?

§. 1. To prepare the Way for removing this Difficulty, I shall here premise some material Considerations, *viz.*

1st, That God can impart his Mind to his own Creature, Man ; even in a Way that is external. This cannot be denied by any who are conscious, that one Man can do so to another.

2^{dly}, That if God did, in an extraordinary Manner, reveal his Mind, the Revelation of it must be still accompanied, with such pregnant Evidence, as could not fail to give an absolute and full Satisfaction or Conviction to the Person who received it, that it was God himself who was the Author of that Revelation. For, otherwise, how could such a Person either proceed to act upon the Faith of it, in any thing commanded ; or impart it to others as a divine Revelation, with a *Thus saith the Lord?*

3^{dly}, That the History of this Transaction, not only affirms that this Revelation was from God ; but also plainly shews, that *Abraham* had a right Conception of it. For God approves of his Conduct, in the 1st and following Verses of this Chapter (and *Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19. Jam. ii. 21. Rom. iv. 3. Gal. iii. 6.*) and this very Instance of it was rewarded,

rewarded, and extolled by God, with the highest Commendation.

4^{thly}, It is to be observed, that though some of a disorder'd Imagination, may really deceive themselves, and endeavour to impose their Delusions, or groundless Pretensions to Divine Revelation, upon others; yet, with regard to the Case before us, there is no Shadow of Suspicion left, that it could be so. For *Abraham* was a Man of singular Prudence, whose distinguish'd Wisdom and Conduct, as well as the Riches and Princely Dignity which he had thereby acquired (under the divine Favour) render'd him honour'd and esteem'd by the great Ones of his Time.

5^{thly}, Neither is there here left the least Shadow of Suspicion, that, in the Case before us, *Abraham* could be imposed on, by any Fondness or easy Credulity, to imagine this Command was from God, without such full and rational Evidence, as render'd it absolutely manifest. For, first, the Command, in itself, and in all its Circumstances, was of an extraordinary kind; seeming at first View, unlikely to proceed from God the Fountain of infinite Goodness, and appearing contradictory to the Law of Nature, and Principles of Humanity; and therefore required to be well examined. 2^{dly}, Because

cause it was to *Abraham* himself a Thing of unexpressible Horror, and shocking beyond all Comparison ; and therefore did awfully demand of him, the most mature and strict Examination. 3dly, and eminently too, Because *Abraham* was so far from being a simple or weak-minded Man, that, on the contrary, he had attained great Knowledge and Experience, especially by such a long and habitual Intercourse with God, as was by this Time dignified with the Title of Friendship, For it came to pass after these Things, as the Text expresseth it, When the Child *Samuel* was the first Time honoured with a divine Revelation, he did not discern it was from God, until he was instructed by old *Eli*, who had prophetical Experience, and did, doubtless, perceive it to be so, from Circumstances not mentioned in that short Narration. But *Abraham* was now so expert, that divine Revelation was become familiar to him, and he could not fail to know the Voice of his Beloved from the ensnaring Language of a Stranger. Before this Time he had been long trained up to this discerning Skill, which had render'd the Criteria of a Revelation from God, familiar to him. We have no less than nine solemn ones upon Record.

The Premising and Establishing of the five mentioned Considerations, will serve to dis-
sipate

sipate a great many little Cavils, by which the modern Infidels endeavour to obscure and embarrass this Question. And they will likewise be useful for clearing the proposed Difficulty, if we shall here join with them *three* other important Truths, *viz.*

1st, That the infinite Creator and Giver of Life hath an absolute Right to lengthen, or shorten it, at his Pleasure; as also to order and determine the Way and Manner of the Death of mortal Creatures, either by a Fever, Pestilence, Sword, or Famine, by a Stroke or a Fall, by a natural or a violent Death, *even tho' they be not actually criminal.* And to talk here that a Man's Life is his Property, is trifling: For no Man can have any Property that is absolutely independent; no, not of his own Life. It is the gross or willful Ignorance of this, that makes our modern Deists plead the Right a Man hath to take away his own Life.

Therefore, in all the Events of Providence, by which Life may be taken away, the divine Equity can never be impeached.

2^{dly}, Far less is it any just Objection against the Justice and Goodness of God; if he, as the universal Governor, shall, in the Virtue of this his absolute Right, order the Life of any Individual to be taken away, how

how innocent soever, for advancing the more extensive and nobler Ends of his Providence, such as the Attainment of a greater Benefit to Mankind, or the affording an illustrious Example of Virtue, or any other higher End.

Especially, *3dly*, when he hath it in his Power, either to restore the Life of the Person so disposed of, or, in Exchange thereof, to impart a greater Felicity.

These *three* Truths last hinted, cannot be disputed: And when they are joined with the five foregoing Considerations, do plainly afford great Advances towards the Clearing of the proposed Difficulty, with regard to the vindicating of the divine Equity, and the Innocency of *Abraham*'s Conduct. Yet, in this notable Transaction, there are weighty Circumstances, from which Difficulties do arise, to the Clearing whereof, altho' they are very useful; yet they are not *alone* sufficient.

§. 2. The Order in which I chuse to represent the Difficulties, is as follows, *viz.*

1st, Had not God promised to *Abraham*, that in his Son *Isaac*, not only his own Seed should be multiplied, but all Nations blessed? How then could he be satisfied that the

the Truth of the divine Promise was not violated by this supposed Command, and the Supposal of his Obedience to it? Had he not Reason to suspect the Command was an Imposture? or, How could his Mind be extricated from its Perplexities, under such Weight of Temptation?

2dly, How could he consent to take away the Life of an innocent Person, nay, of *Isaac*, his own guiltless Child, and be himself the Executioner of the Child, the only Child of the virtuous and affectionate *Sarah*; and by such an Action of Barbarity to treat her with greater Cruelty than if he had taken away her own Life? Had not God planted in his Soul the unchangeable Principle of common Equity, not to slay the Innocent? Had not God endow'd and impregnated him with that natural Affection, which is originally interwoven in the very human Constitution? Must the virtuous *Abraham*, with his own Hands, become the Actor in this bloody Tragedy? How could he suffer it ever to enter into his Thought, that a Command, every way so shocking, could proceed from the eternal Fountain of Equity and Goodness? Is it possible that the God of infinite Justice and Mercy, the Father and Lover of Mankind, could ever authorize, or expressly command this?

3dly, Altho' the Revelation which we enjoy and believe, had never mentioned God's Detestation and Abhorrence of the offering up any human Sacrifice, as it doth most expressly, *Deut. xii. 30, 31.* where he declares it to be an Abomination to him ; yet it is, in itself, so grating to human Nature, as to affect it with the utmost Horror, insomuch that it is astonishing that any of Mankind should ever have become so degenerate and abandoned, or so impos'd on by the Devil, as to be drawn into the Practice of it. And therefore, surely *Abraham*, who had the true Idea of God, could never think such a Sacrifice would be acceptable. How then could he believe the Command to offer it, did truly proceed from his God, the God of infinite Perfection, Love, and Goodness ?

This is the Sum of the Difficulties in their utmost Force, which are necessary to be removed, for the Satisfaction of a rational and candid Mind.

§. 3. Before I proceed to solve these Difficulties, I shall make some short Remarks upon *three* Things which have been pleaded in their Extenuation, though, in Reality, they are not satisfactory.

1/7, It

1st, It may indeed be some Abatement of the Difficulties to be removed, that the Event declares it was not God's Design, that *Isaac* should be actually offered in Sacrifice. But this is far from being an effectual Solution. For it was plainly the Intention of God, that *Abraham* should believe he had so commanded him expressly. And it is manifest, that the *Trial* of his Faith and Obedience consisted in this particular Circumstance; and therefore the Difficulty is no less pressing, so far as relates to the Satisfaction of *Abraham's* Conscience as to his Conduct, than if God had really intended the actual Execution.

A second thing pleaded, which may seem to be an Abatement of the proposed Difficulties, is, that there is Reason to think *Isaac* was himself willing and consenting. For he had Strength sufficient to carry the heavy Burthen of so much Wood, as might suffice to perform the Burnt-Offering ordered; and consequently to have resisted the weak old Man, who was an hundred Years old when his Son was born. This indeed is sufficient to prove, that *Isaac* was himself consenting; tho' we should have no Recourse to the *Jewish* Traditions; some of which say he was then 37 Years, others 30; *Bochart* makes him 38; *Josephus* 25; and this Historian relates a long pathetick Conference,

which passed on the Mountain between the Father and Son, to testify the Consent of the latter. But there is no need of this precarious Proof; for, without Recourse to it, the Reason before given, renders *Isaac's* consenting to undergo whatever God had ordered, manifest. However, when we consider, 1st, That *Isaac's* Life was not absolutely at his own Disposal: And, 2dly, That *Abraham* was to have taken away the Life of an innocent Person; the whole Difficulty relating to the Equity of the Command, and the Justification of *Abraham's* Conduct, is but little lessened by *Isaac's* Compliance.

3dly, There are some who plead, that the very Nature of *Justice*, *Righteousness*, *Vera-
city*, &c. flows only from the *arbitrary Will* of God; and therefore that in the Case under Consideration, the Supposal of a divine Command, how much soever otherwise unjust, is sufficient to vindicate its Equity. To use the Language of the *Schools*, this is their *Prima Regula Morum*, their fundamental Principle with regard to the Nature of moral Good and Evil: The Principle on which they pretend to establish and justify their Doctrine of Absolute Reprobation, which is by *Calvin* himself called *Horribile Decretum, a Horrible Decree*. But what do these Gentlemen mean, when they speak of God as a Being of infinite *Justice*, *Righte-
ousness*,

ousness, Truth, &c. ? What is their *Idea of* the *unchangeable God*, or even of his *necessary Existence* ? Their Language and pretended *Idea of God*, can have no fixed Sense or Meaning, if these Perfections, which are said to be essential to him, are not fixed and immutable. If *Justice, Righteousness, Truth, &c.* as well as *unchangeable and necessary Existence*, are not necessarily fixed, eternally inherent in, and derived from the Nature of the infinitely perfect Being ; their Sentiments of these Perfections in the Deity are perfectly inconsistent and fallacious, and they can neither be understood by others, nor understand themselves. This Reasoning subverts at once the very fundamental Principle upon which that Doctrine must stand or fall ; and I am surpris'd that I do not observe it insisted on.

These short Remarks upon the *three* Things that have been pleaded, may make it apparent that they are not satisfactory. It is therefore necessary to search further for the due Solution of the proposed Difficulties.

§. 4. To enter then upon this Inquiry, in a rational Manner, is the *Task* I have undertaken ; And to do it, *with Candour and Clearness*,

1st, It must be acknowledged by all, that if *Abraham* had not the most clear and absolute

solute Evidence, that the Command was truly from God ; not only the Execution of it, but the Intention to perform it, and every Advance in order to it, would have been a most barbarous Impiety. But then, with regard to this, the *five Considerations* which have been premised and established (§. 1.) leave no reasonable Ground of doubting, that he truly had the most plenary and absolute Evidence for his Conviction, that the Command did certainly proceed from God ; and the very *Possibility* that *Abraham* had this clear and absolute Evidence is enough to my Purpose, and will dissipate all Absurdity relating to this Point.

However, let not the *Deists* here take Umbrage, from my affirming, that the Considerations premised (in §. 1.) leave no just Ground of Suspicion, that *Abraham* was not well satisfied and duly convinced of this Point ; as if I were pretending, that those *five Considerations* were sufficient to prove against a *Deist*, that this Command given to *Abraham*, was from God. For the Proof of this Point is not my present Task. I am only defending it against the Cavils and Objections of the *Deists*. The proving that the whole Bible is from God, and consequently this Portion of it, is not my present Province. But when the *Deists* are endeavouring to confute this great Truth, and have brought

brought this Portion of Scripture upon the Carpet, pretending to fix Absurdities upon it, and thereby to conclude against the whole Tenour of Sacred Writ ; if I can duly remove these Absurdities, and answer all their Objections and Cavils against this Portion of it ; all their Attempts will then be entirely frustrated ; and this is my *Task*. For I am neither begging the Question, nor proving that this Revelation was from God to *Abraham*. I am only defending that Truth against the Attacks of *Deists*, removing their Cavils, and answering their Objections : And if these *five Considerations* represented and established in §. 1. do sufficiently render it credible, that *Abraham* might *possibly* be satisfied that this Command was from God ; this abundantly serves my Purpose : The very *Possibility* of this would be sufficient, and much more the *Probability*.

And considering *Abraham* in this Situation, the *three* Truths also hinted in §. 1. could not fail to afford a great Degree of Light to his perplexed Mind, under this dark Cloud of *Trial*. We are sure, indeed, he was not ignorant of what he had himself formerly pleaded with God, (*Gen. 18.*) *Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right* ? But at the same time, he knew that God had an absolute Right to dispose of *Isaac's* Life, whenever he pleased, and in what Manner he should

should think fit. The Innocency of *Isaac's* tender Age gave him no Exemption, but if he was of such Age as render'd him able to bear a heavy Burthen of Wood, this doth the less consist with a sinless State, or an absolute Innocency. How far the Influence of this Reasoning, drawn from what hath been premised, might operate upon the Mind of *Abraham*, is needless to insist upon.

What was the *first*, or the *last*, of the Difficulties that occur'd to this great Patriarch, we cannot tell. But surely every Difficulty he had to combat, did necessarily require a separate Consideration. And which of them we shall *first* or *last* examine, is not material. Nor is it necessary for us to represent, or even to know, all the Objections he had to encounter. It is sufficient if we can conceive how he might satisfy his own Mind, with regard to the most weighty of them, that have ever been suggested.

§. 5. Let us suppose then, that the *first* Difficulty which *Abraham* had to grapple with, was the Promise, *In Isaac shall thy Seed be called*, (Gen. xxi. 12.) and that in him *all the Nations of the Earth were to be blessed*, (Gen. xix.) How could this consist with the taking away the Life of *Isaac*? What would then become of the Fidelity of the divine Promise? How may we think, this

this might shake the old Man's Faith, whose Belief of this Promise, in the seeming Impossibility of its Accomplishment, was imputed to him for Righteousness?

The Answer to this Branch of Difficulty is abundantly suggested, (§. 1.) in the third of the important Truths there hinted, *viz.* That *Abraham* knew God had it in his Power to restore Life to *Isaac*. Or, to use the Words of the Apostle (*Heb. xi. 19.*) *Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the Dead; from whence also he received him in a Figure.* Which Text doth plainly testify, that this was the very Key that opened unto the Patriarch the Solution of this Branch of his *Trial*.

In the short Advance hitherto made, our *Task* hath been easy; and the *Trial* of *Abraham* might also seem to be so, if what follows did not increase both our *Task*, and the Prospect of his severer *Trial*.

§. 6. Suppose then the next Stage of his *Trial* to have been, the exceeding Horror that must have seized his virtuous Mind, to be himself the Actor in this bloody Tragedy; to imbrue his Hands in human Blood, the Blood of his own innocent Child. Must not all the Principles of natural Equity, common Humanity, and the tender Compassion

sion of a merciful and virtuous Mind, stare him in the Face ? And how must the Horror have been aggravated from the Principle of natural Affection ? a Principle so interwoven in the very Constitution of our human Nature, that it cannot be extinguished in the Breast of any Parent, who is not more savage than the most devouring Beasts. A Lion or a Tyger would not thus serve their own Off-spring. How then could the strongest Evidence induce him to harbour a Thought, that a Command of this kind could flow from the infinite Fountain of Justice and Goodness ?

Here indeed is presented a Scene of *Trial*, with such a Complication of Difficulties, as required the Faith and Fortitude of an *Abraham* to encounter, and come off victorious.

And if any should pretend here to plead, that the Circumstance of *Isaac's* being his own Child, did rather extenuate than aggravate the Matter ; because, if he had been the Child of another Man, it would have aggravated ^{it by} the Injustice offer'd to a third Person ; it may be replied, that in the Case under our present View, the Mother, *Sarah*, is this third Person to be injured, and bereaved of her only Child ; and so all the other Circumstances of Aggravation are still attended even with this likewise.

Having

Having thus carried the Difficulty to its highest Pitch, however pinching it may seem to be, yet the Solution ought to be full and satisfying ; and therefore it must be likewise plain, and clear'd from all Obscurity.

And, *1st*, we are here again to remember, the Patriarch was still assured, that in all Events his beloved Son *Isaac* was to be the surviving Child of himself, and of *Sarah* : *Accounting* (as in the Text before cited) that *God was able to raise him up, even from the Dead* ; *from whence also he received him in a Figure*. If he did firmly believe the Promise, that in *Isaac*, the same individual *Isaac*, his Seed should be multiplied, and *all the Nations of the Earth blessed* ; this same Promise, and the firm Belief of it, if duly consider'd, did evidently and necessarily render him no less assured of *Isaac's* Survival. On the one hand, he was certain that the Command of *Trial* was from God : On the other, he was no less certain, that it was the same God who had made the Promise. He knew he was the God both of infinite Veracity and infinite Power. This did indeed require a strong *Faith* ; but such was the *Faith* of *Abraham* (*Rom. iv. 5, 9, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19.*)

From the Texts here referred unto, it is plainly intimated, that it was this Assurance of *Isaac's* Survival, to which the Patriarch had Recourse in this his extreme Perplexity, as a sure Anchor, or Fountain of Relief. His firm Belief of the Promises did exceedingly lessen the Difficulty, fortify him for his *Trial*, and in all Respects conduce to facilitate his Obedience. And thus we see God hath been mercifully pleased, for our Satisfaction, to point out unto us, in the holy Scriptures, this one great Step towards the Solving the Difficulty.

I may add too, that the Objection seeming to arise from any Violation of the Justice due to *Sarah* the Mother, was hereby dissipated. Her Husband was well assured, that in the Event, she could be no Loser, but rather a Gainer, by receiving a new Confirmation of her Faith in the Divine Promises relating to her Son: So here is another Knot unloosed.

2dly, *Abraham* was not ignorant, that this Life is a State of Probation, and that all the *Trials* of God's faithful Servants, are still for their Advantage; and from long Experience and Observation, he could not fail to know, that extraordinary *Trials* from God, are designed for extraordinary Ends and

and Purposes: And, therefore, dark and cloudy as his *Trial* was, and how mysterious foever it appeared in every Point of View, yet, he was well assured, that the Event would be perfectly harmonious and beautiful. And, on this Account, a ready Obedience, *as far as his Light served him*, became his present Duty, committing the Event unto a God of infinite Justice, Wisdom, Power, Holiness and Goodness, with an absolute and entire Resignation to his Will.

However, that we may be the more clear and distinct, in removing every Difficulty that occurs, with Regard to the taking away the Life of *Isaac*; seeing there were *two* great *Branches* of Difficulty that presented themselves to *Abraham's* virtuous Mind; *viz.* *1st*, Was he to slay an Innocent? *2dly*, Was he not himself the Father of this Innocent? It is therefore fit, to examine the Difficulty with which the Patriarch struggled, so as to find the Solution of it, with Respect to *each* of these *two Branches* *separately*.

§. 7. To begin then with the *first Branch*: It was, indeed, extraordinary and shocking to Amazement, that the God of infinite Justice and Goodness, the Father and Lover of Mankind, should command *Abraham* to take away

away the Life of an innocent Person. But the Patriarch was well apprised of *two* Things, by which he might get over this Difficulty, when he duly and deliberately weighed them ; and for this, he had Time, *viz.* from the Command given, to the third Day after, Verse 4.

For, *1st*, he well knew, that God had an absolute Right (as in §.1.) to lengthen or shorten Life, at his Pleasure ; and to order the Manner of the Death of every Mortal, and that the Innocence, even of Childhood, is no Bar against this Prerogative.

2dly, He knew, likewise, that infinite Wisdom never exerts this absolute Right, merely because he can do it, or from a mere arbitrary Humour, but only for his own wise Ends and Purposes. And that, as the universal Sovereign Ruler, the greater and more extensive Good of Mankind, is one of those wise Ends and Purposes, which may sometimes determine him to use this his absolute Right.

And seeing he believed the Promise, that *in Isaac, all the Nations of the Earth were to be blessed*, he had Reason to conclude, that a Command, so extraordinary, relating to *Isaac*, was in Pursuance of something which tended to that high and noble End. And, from

from these Considerations, there may well be drawn, a full and satisfying Answer to this *first Branch* of the Difficulty; *viz.* That God might justly order *Abraham* to take away the Life of an innocent Person.

I shall illustrate this, by an Example that can be well justified, taken also from the holy Scripture, *viz.*

That God might give a great and awful Example to all After-Generations, of his just Severity upon People and Nations, who have abandoned themselves to all Manner of daring and aggravated Wickedness; he expressly commanded the *Israelites* to destroy the seven devoted Nations of *Canaan*, by an utter Excision: And, among them, there were many Thousands of innocent Children to be slain, who had not contracted the least Guilt by any actual Transgression. Yet, who can impeach the Justice and Goodness of God, that shall consider him as the universal Governor, acting for the more extensive Good of Mankind, in this awful and lasting Monument of his deserved Justice? And, even with Respect to the innocent Children, this Conduct of Providence may be fully vindicated, if it be likewise considered, that God had it in his Power, to impart to them, a greater Felicity in a future Life,

Life, in Exchange of a Life, which is, at best, very transient and full of Trouble.

Shall it be lawful for Kings and States, and their Generals, in a just War, to burn and destroy whole Cities, and in them, Multitudes of innocent People? And, yet, shall the Right of God, to dispose of the Lives of such, for carrying on his own more wise and higher Purposes, to promote the universal Good, be disputed; though he has it in his Power to impart to them an eternal and greater Felicity? And why may not he chuse, either to order Men to be the Instruments, or Plague, Famine, or an Earthquake, or a Deluge, or Fire and Brimstone rained from Heaven?

Enough hath been said, to convince us, that *Abraham* might satisfy his own Conscience, with Regard to the Life of an Innocent, which God might justly order to be cut off, in Prosecution of his own most wise and more extensive Ends. None, who own a Deity, can dispute this his absolute Right; and if the mentioned Command to the *Israelites*, relating to the Lives of so many Thousands of innocent Children, can be so easily justified, what should then abridge the same universal Sovereign, of his equal Right to command any one Man to be the Instrument

ment in taking away the Life of any one Child, even of an innocent *Isaac* ?

§. 8. But what if the Man so commanded by God, is himself the Father of this innocent Child ? This Question expressly states the second mentioned *Branch* of *Abraham's* Difficulty ; and I shall briefly answer it, by another short Question; *viz.* If it can be the Duty of any other Man, to obey such Command ; then, by what Rule or Law, could even the Father plead Exemption ? Did his paternal Relation give him any Right or Title to this ? Could this give a Privilege to refuse Obedience to God, in any Command which he would have been obliged to obey otherwise.

It is true, this is a Circumstance in the *Trial* of *Abraham*, that did render it most grievous, painful and afflicting, and even to such Degree, that nothing less than the Faith and Piety of an *Abraham*, could bear up under it. But this is not the *Point* in Question ; this doth neither encrease nor diminish the Difficulty under Consideration. The Question before us, is only this : Can it consist with the Divine Equity, to command a Father to slay his own Son ? Or, can it be the Duty of a Father, in such Case, to obey ? And it is obvious, that the grievous, painful and afflicting Circumstances, do not affect

the Question we are now upon ; which therefore must be stript of all those concomitant Circumstances.

And here the Bible doth again afford us a notable Help to satisfy our Minds, in the precise Question that now lies before us ; viz. in *Deut. xiii. 6.* and following Verses : *If thy Brother, the Son of thy Mother, thy Son, or thy Daughter, — entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other Gods, — thou shalt not consent, — neither shall thine Eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare him, neither shalt thou conceal him, but thou shalt surely kill him : Thine Hand shall be upon him to put him to Death ; and afterwards the Hands of all the People, and thou shalt stone him with Stones that he die. —*

There is nothing can be more manifest, than that the Parents are here expressly commanded to accuse, and solemnly to slay their own Children, who should, even secretly, entice them to the worshipping of false Gods, as the publick Executioners of the deserved Punishment.

I am well apprised, that a *Deist* will here be ready to answer, that tho' I could bring an hundred such Examples from the Bible, it signifies nothing to him, who wholly disowns and rejects it ; that this is only to

to bring one unnatural, barbarous Precept, to justify another of the same Kind. To this I reply, that I do not pretend to bring this Citation from *Deut. xiii.* as a convincing Argument, drawn from an Example that is of any Weight to a *Deist*, who rejects the whole Bible: No, I only bring it as a Key and Help to open my Way into the Solution of the Difficulty now before us: And it plainly contributes to this, by suggesting a Case, a stated Case, that will answer all my Purpose, even tho' the said Case had never actually existed, but shall only be considered as a Supposition. For, if in any supposed and stated Case, it may be the Duty of a Parent to slay his own Child; why should this be controverted in the Case of *Abraham* and *Isaac*? seeing we have already accounted for the respective Difference, with Regard to *Isaac's* Innocency.

Now, as to this stated Case, brought from *Deut. xiii.* what Person, who considers the heinous Guilt of serving false Gods; and withal, how exceedingly addicted the *Israelites* were to it, and that they were surrounded with Nations, the most gross Idolaters; who, I say, that considers all this, can entertain the least Doubt, that this was not a necessary, as well as a just Law? Is it not manifest, from their History, that even the Severity of this Law, together with

all the Care that God had taken otherwife, to restrain them, was not effectual? Yet this was all that could be done; and, indeed, it had been justifiable, even for a pious human Governor, nay, for a *Deist* Lawgiver, to have framed such a Law, to restrain a People so perversely addicted to the serving of false Gods.

After what hath been fully proved. (*viz.* §. 7.) with Regard to the Right that God hath to take away the Life of an Innocent, until that is confuted, it will not be fair nor candid, for a *Deist* to plead, that this other Example, introduced from *Deut.* xiii. as a Voucher, doth not come up to the Case before us; because, in this Case, now introduced, there is a criminal Demerit, for which the punishing the Guilty with Death, may be a deserved Punishment; whereas, in the Case before us, the Command given was to slay the innocent *Isaac*. I say, this would not be fair, because it has been already answered, when we were upon the *first Branch* of this Stage of *Abraham's Trial*. We are now upon the *second Branch*, relating to the Command given to a Father. And, to repeat the *first Branch*, in the present Question, which is to stand or fall, by itself, would only tend to perplex the present Question, with that Mist of Intricacy, which has been already dissipated. This

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Manner of blending Things together, which are, in themselves, of a different Nature, is only practised by those who study to keep Things in the Dark, but is altogether unbecoming those who candidly search after Truth; I therefore refer to §. 7. where all the Difficulty relating to *Isaac's Innocency*, is fully cleared and removed.

And this is certain, that if I can vindicate, in a satisfactory Manner, the Equity of the Command given to *Abraham*, and his Obedience to it, both in the *first Branch*, relating to the slaying an innocent Person; and, in the *second Branch*, with Reference to the Ties of Nature, upon a Father to his own Child. If this, I say, can be sufficiently performed, in both Branches, by treating of each of them separately, as I have done; then, sure I am, the whole Difficulty included and wrapt up in both Branches, must fall to the Ground, and be entirely at an End; because two Propositions that are just, when considered separately, can never concur to form a third Proposition, which is unjust, no more than a false Conclusion can be truly inferred from two Premises that are true. This is the Logick, even of common Sense.

Two Objections have been raised to overturn all that can be pleaded in Vindication of

of *Abraham's* ready Obedience, when commanded to slay his own Son, *viz.*

First, That the Defence and Protection of his own Child's Life, was a Trust consigned to him by the Law of Nature; but, I must ask, who instituted this Law of Nature, and established the Sanction of it? And to whom was *Abraham* accountable for the Breach of this Trust? Can it be imagined, that God, who created this Trust, for the Child's Security, against all other violent Aggressors, did design or order it to be discharged, by the Parent, even in Opposition to his Divine Command? No Law of Nature could bind, or even license him, to dispute his own Right or Trust against God himself, the Author, both of Nature, and of that very Trust.

The other Objection, is drawn from that natural Affection, which God hath planted in the Bowels of Parents; and it is pretended that this was violated by *Abraham's* Readiness to obey: I answser, that this natural Affection, ought still, to be in Subordination to the Love and Obedience due to God. In *Abraham's* Case, the Competition was betwixt his natural Affection, on the one Hand, and his Obedience and Love due to God, on the other Hand: *And whosoever loveth Son or Daughter more than God, is not worthy*

worthy of him. All our Affections are infused into our Souls by the divine Bounty, to be a Spur to Virtue, and a Restraint against Enormity: But common Reason, it self, is sufficient to convince us, that these Affections, instead of being the Rule of our Conduct, are, themselves, to be duly governed and regulated.

A fruitful Invention, might state a Variety of Cases, in which it would become, not only lawful, but an indispensable Duty in a Parent, to take away the Life of his own Child: As, for Instance, if the Son of a Prince should become the Enemy and Destroyer of his Country, if he attempted the Death of his Father, in a rebellious Association, and should continue incorrigible, after all Endeavours to reclaim him; if he had wilfully murdered his Mother, or his elder Brother, or committed any other Crime destructive of Society; doth not History afford us many laudable Examples of Parents, who have abandoned their dearest Children to Destruction, when the *Safety Peace* and Service of their Country required such a Sacrifice? And, shall the Love and Duty to one's Country, be allowed to have such Force, and the Effect of it be accounted so meritorious? And, yet, at the same time, shall the Effect of *Abraham's* Love and Duty to God, be censured and condemned?

§. 9. I proceed now, to another *Stage* of *Abraham's Trial*, which is the third and last, in the Order I have chosen to place them; namely, *The Command to offer up unto God a Human Sacrifice*. We know how much that hideous Practice has prevailed, where Divine Revelation was not imparted; and, we are sensible, that it is continued, even to this Day, among Pagan Nations; which certainly should convince us of the Benefit we enjoy by Divine Revelation, when we observe how ineffectual the Religion of mere *Nature*, is against that barbarous Custom.

And, indeed, this seems to me to be the greatest Difficulty that occurred to *Abraham* in the whole Course of his *Trial*. It has been hinted before, (§. 2.) that tho' the Revelation which we enjoy and believe, had never mentioned God's Detestation of the Offering up unto him any Human Sacrifice, as in *Deut.* xii. 30, 31. where God most expressly testifies his Abomination of being so served: Yet it is, in itself, so shocking to Human Nature, as to render it astonishing, that any Part of Mankind should ever have appeared so degenerate, or so far imposed on by the Devil, as to be drawn into the Practice of it.

How could *thinking Man*, ever be drawn into the Love and Worship of such a Deity as would accept of a Worship, blended with so much Inhumanity? How could it ever enter into the Thought of any virtuous Mind, to imitate such a Deity, or to desire to be like him? If the God of infinite Love and Mercy, be considered as the Father and Lover of Mankind ; if Man, the Off-spring of God, be considered as a Favourite, dignified by his Creator, to be the Lord of this inferior World ; who can think that this God, whose Providence is continually exerted for the Welfare of Man, can have the Cruelty to delight in the Effusion of Human Blood ; or that the Reek of this from his Altar, can be a solemn Part of his Worship, and an acceptable Offering? Thus far the Light of Nature, and the *Idea* it gives of God, are capable of raising Horror, at the Commission of so much Barbarity.

But *Abraham* had the Light of Divine Revelation, and a more perfect Knowledge of God ; his Acquaintance with the Deity, was raised to the Degree of Friendship. He not only knew that Man is the Image of God, and, as such, to be honoured and loved by all who partake of the same Nature ; but also, that to restore Man from the Ruin in-

to which he had involved himself, God had promised to send his own dear Son into the World, to assume the human Nature into one Person with the Divinity. *Abraham*, saw this Day afar off, and rejoiced to behold the Human Nature so highly exalted ; He knew that God delights to have Communion with Man, and to render all Men Partakers of the Divine Nature, to restore them to the Privileges of the Sons of God, and unite them to himself by his **Holy Spirit** ; and that even the Bodies of Men are the Temples of the **Holy Ghost**. He knew that God had fenced Human Life by his revealed Law ; that he has no Delight in the Death, even of Sinners ; that he doth not afflict willingly, or grieve the Children of Men ; that even when their Punishment becomes necessary, it is only inflicted for the Good of Individuals, or the greater Benefit of Mankind ; and that, even then, it is, as it were, extorted from God, and is his *strange Work* ; that, when even Multitudes are cut off, in their incorrigible Demerit, it is not only to be a Warning to surviving Mankind, and future Generations; ^{but also} to prevent the further Encrease of their own Guilt, and consequently of their own greater Misery hereafter, in the other World.

Abraham, likewise, well knew, that the infinite Purity of God, is such, that a Human

man Sacrifice must necessarily be an Abomination to him ; that since the Fall of Man, all the Race, are more or less in a State of moral Impurity, and, thereby, instead of any Capacity, to atone for others, stand in Need of an Expiation for themselves ; must it not have raised Horror in *Abraham* to think of sacrificing unto God, who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity, the Sacrifice of a Creature, stained and defiled with moral Impurity ? We know, that by the *Jewish* Law, no Beast having the least Spot or Blemish, could be offered in Sacrifice, and we know the moral Import and Meaning implied in this Law. And *Abraham*, well knew, that the Blood of *Bulls and Goats*, &c. tho' incapable of any moral Pollution, *could not take away Sin*, or the Punishment of it, by their own proper Efficacy, though the Sacrifice of those Creatures, was instituted by God ; and that their only Virtue consisted in their being the appointed Types and Shadows of the Atonement to be made by the promised Messiah, the Lamb of God, without Spot and Blemish ; and that if they had been capable of any moral Impurity, even *that*, would have rendered them incapable of being the proper Types of the atoning, immaculate, spotless Messiah. Who can think of the *Idea*, the true *Idea*, *Abraham* had of the Deity, as the God of infinite Purity, as well as the God of infinite Love and Mercy, and the

Father of Mankind ; and not be convinced that this Circumstance of the Command, to offer to him a *Human Sacrifice*, was truly the hardest Part, and the greatest Difficulty that occurred to him in all his *Trial* ?

The strong Perplexity which affected the Mind and Conscience of *Abraham*, with Respect to this Point, hath been now sufficiently represented ; and it were needless to insist more upon it.

And, although, even in the View we now have of this Difficulty, it is manifest, by the Event, that it was not God's Intention, to have *Isaac* offered to himself in Sacrifice ; which renders our Minds easy, and rescues us from the Horror of such an Action : Yet, it is manifest, that *Abraham* had not this Advantage. For, after all the Series of the previous Circumstances, until he stretched forth his *Hand*, and took the *Knife* ; nay, not until the *Angel* called to him, and said, *Abraham, Abraham, &c.* I say, never before all this, could he think any thing less was to follow, than the Slaughter of his Son. And what may we imagine were his Thoughts all this Time ? How could he reconcile his own Mind and Conscience, to the sacrificing a fallen Man to God, the Father of Mankind, the God of infinite Purity, as well as infinite Goodness and

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Compassion ? Had not *Abraham* the true *Idea* of God ? And, if he had, how could he doubt that Human Sacrifice is an Abomination to him ? And yet, we find him proceeding still, until it came to the important Moment, in which the final Execution was to be performed. It must, indeed, be owned, that there is here something so mysterious, that it is not easy to unfold it.

The whole Subject, here treated, may sufficiently assure us, that *Abraham reasoned* with great Application of Mind, throughout all the Stages of this singular Transaction. In *Heb. xi. 19.* the original Word used by the Apostle, is, *λογισάμενος*, which our Translators have rendered *accounting* : But, it expressly signifies, that *Abraham reasoned* ; and is the same original Word, used above twenty other times in the New Testament, and still so rendered in our Bible, as to denote *Reasoning*.

But since God has not been pleased in his Word, to lay before us, the Course of *Reasoning* upon this intricate Point, which had for some Days passed in the Patriarch's pious Mind, nor to point out unto us the Topsicks which determined him to enter upon Obedience, and to be still proceeding : We are, therefore, left to our own modest Enquiry, and Conjecture. Yet, at the same time,

time, in all our Enquiry, we are still to remember, on the one Hand, that God did highly approve of *Abraham's* Conduct; and, on the other Hand, that we are not to charge God foolishly, as if a *Human Sacrifice* could be acceptable to him; or that he could be willing his Friend *Abraham* should ever think so.

And it is in the due Remembrance of these two Particulars, and with a steady Eye upon them; that in our humble and modest Enquiry into this Labyrinth, we cannot rest in the Solution of this Difficulty, which some pretend to draw from that noted Maxim, *Volenti non fit injuria*; *i. e.* one is not injured by any Deed that is agreeable to his own Will: My Reason is, because it was highly injurious to God, for *Abraham* to have admitted any such *Idea* of him, as to think a *Human Sacrifice* could please him, or, that ever he could countenance such an Abomination.

But did not God expressly command this, as well as the other previous Circumstances, which tended to it? I answer, it is true, he did so; but it is no less true, that in due Time, he countermanded it, which renders it manifest to us, as it did then also render it manifest to *Abraham*, that this Circumstance of offering up *Isaac* in Sacrifice, was never God's

God's Intention, and consequently, that this was only a *Command of Trial*.

Well, as the Evidence of this affords Ease to our Minds ; so when the same became manifest to *Abraham*, it could not fail to relieve him from his Anguish and Perplexity ; because, to his Joy and Comfort, this Discovery dissipated all the Darkness that hung upon his Mind, with Regard to this very Circumstance.

But did not this Darkness, and all the Horror that attended it, still lie heavy upon the Mind of *Abraham*, during all the Course of this Transaction, from the Time he first received the Command, to the very Minute of his Relief, by the Voice of the Angel ? My Answer is, that no Man, who believes that *Abraham* had the true *Idea* of God, and knows that God did approve of his Conduct, can doubt of this, without a plain Contradiction to the manifest Dictate of his own rational Mind ; because such is the infinite Purity and Holiness of the Divine Nature, that it was not possible for *Abraham*, who had so much Knowledge of God, to conceive how it could consist therewith, to accept and approve of the hideous Barbarity of such a *Human Sacrifice* ; and it would have been gross Ignorance of the Divine Nature,

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or greatly injurious to God, if *Abraham* had conceived otherwise of him.

Now, although, I think, the Reasoning, in this last Paragraph, renders it manifest, that the Mind of the Patriarch was never dispossess'd of this Darkness and perplexing Horror, which attended it, with Relation to this Circumstance of a *Human Sacrifice* commanded to be offered by him, until the critical Minute of his hearing the Words of the Angel: Yet, it is not necessary for me, to urge this as a concluding Proof: No it will abundantly serve my Purpose, in order to clear the Difficulty under Consideration, if this be allowed only as a Thing *possible*, and much more, if it be admitted as a probable Hypothesis.

For it has been remarked above, that, with Regard to this most intricate Part of the Difficulty, arising from this Portion of *Genesis*, the Scripture doth not point out unto us the Way of solving it; and that it is thereby left to our own humble and modest Enquiry and Conjecture. And, if, upon this Supposition, or probable Hypothesis, that, with Regard to the offering a *Human Sacrifice*, *Abraham* did still continue in this State of perplexing Darkness, until the Mist was cleared up by the Angel's Voice; if, I say, upon this Supposition, I can account, both for

for his Conduct, and the Divine Equity, in this whole Transaction ; then all the Difficulty is at an End. If there is even but *one Way* left, that is *possible* only, for solving the Difficulty, and a *Way* that is, in all Respects, agreeable to Reason, there can remain no Absurdity.

§. 10. Supposing, then, that this was truly the Patriarch's Case, from the first Intimation of the Command given, to the very Minute, in which the Angel called to him. Supposing, likewise, that in the Course of his Meditation, through the other Stages of his *Trial*, which have been sufficiently represented ; that he had got over all the other weighty Difficulties, presented to his pious Mind, with Regard, both to the slaying an Innocent, and to a Father's acting this Part upon his own Child ; and that he had likewise got over all Objections relating to these, by *Reasoning* with himself, in the same Manner that I have reasoned upon them ; and from the very same Considerations that I have mentioned ; and that now there remained nothing else, to afford just Ground to demur or hesitate upon his Obedience to the Command given, except this one Objection, namely, the heinous Barbarity of a *Human Sacrifice* to be offered by him : I say supposing all this ; and if any other Man could possibly be so situated, this might be

his Case, and may, therefore, be *supposed* as a Thing *possible*.

Well, then, in this Case, certainly there is one Thing manifest, *viz.* That the Absurdity of thinking this could be acceptable to God, or consistent with the infinitely perfect Deity to allow it, or, even not to have it in Abomination, can never be charged on the virtuous *Abraham*; for, on the contrary, we have supposed, that the Horror of it, was still upon his pious Mind, from the Beginning, to the End of his *Trial*; and far less did he fall into the Absurdity of acting this Abomination against the Light of his Conscience, and the truly rational Dictates of his own virtuous Mind: And, consequently, there is nothing in all this to render it absurd, that he did receive God's Approbation upon the whole of his Conduct.

Now, if it be likewise manifest, from the Event, that it was never God's Intention, that *Abraham* should actually fall into this Abomination; then, where can there yet remain any Absurdity, with Regard, either to the Conduct of God, or of *Abraham*.

If one shall here reply, that it is absurd, to imagine, it was the Intention of God, that *Abraham* should think such a monstrous Action

tion, could be his Holy Will, or, that *such a Human Sacrifice*, was not an Abomination to him: I answer, that so indeed, it certainly is: To imagine the contrary, is a most high Indignity to God, exceedingly absurd, and an Affront to his most Holy Nature. But, at the same time, I deny, with Indignation, that ever it was God's Intention, that *Abraham* should think so. Nay, I further affirm, that, if the Breast of *Abraham*, had harboured such a wicked Thought, he could never have received the Divine Approbation.

The only Difficulty, that seems now to remain, is, this Question that naturally arises, *viz.* How can all this consist with the plain and express Words of the Command given; *and offer him there for a burnt Offering?* Must we here have Recourse to the wild Distinction of two opposite and contradictory Wills in God, a *secret* and a *revealed Will*? No, God forbid, we should ever entertain such a blasphemous Conception.

Our Answer is, that this was only a *Command of Trial*, not that God wanted to know the Faith and Probity of *Abraham* his Friend, or his cautious and steady Care to avoid every known Sin, and to give a ready Obedience to the Divine Commands. But,

1st, to make the good Man better known to his own Mind, by such a comfortable pregnant Proof of his own Sincerity. 2^{dly}, to render him an illustrious Example of Faith and Obedience to Posterity, in all future Ages. 3^{dly}, to afford a more beautiful Type of the promised *Messiah*, his Death, Resurrection, the Propitiation thereby made, and the Redemption of Mankind thereby purchased.

I say, this was only *a Command of Trial*; and, as such, it is far from being necessary, that the *Intention* of God, who gave it, should be, to have the final Performance of it, in every Circumstance; especially, when the Circumstance to be *last* performed, would have been an Affront, Indignity and Abomination to himself: And, in like manner, if it would have been highly criminal in *Abraham*, to imagine, that the offering *such a Human Sacrifice*, was not an Abomination to him; then, certainly, it could never be the Design of God, to convince *Abraham*, that this was his *Intention*.

We ought, therefore, to consider the Command given, as only *a Command of Trial*; and that it was never the *Intention* of God, either to have the *last* Circumstance of it (i. e. the *Sacrificing*) actually performed, or that *Abraham* should conclude, that this was his

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Intention; and as it was only a *Command of Trial*, so it was a *Trial* exceedingly great, and, in all its Circumstances, severe, beyond all Expression, as will be more evident, by the following short Review of it.

§. 11. Let us here fix our Meditation a little upon this *severe Trial*. To slay an innocent Son; concerning whom he had such Promises; to do this *λογισάμενος* in the Original, (*Hebr. xi. 19.*) which expressly signifies a deliberate *Reasoning* upon the whole: This was a hard Task, and only to be sustained by one of *Abraham's* Faith and Fortitude. However, from what has been already represented, we may be able to conceive, how, by *Reasoning* with himself, even in the same Manner, as we have before reasoned, and in the full Evidence, that God had commanded all this: I say, we may be able to conceive, how he might get over all the Objections which stood in the Way; and consequently be convinced, that, *thus far*, a ready Obedience was his Duty.

But the Circumstance, to be *last* performed, *viz.* the offering up a *Human Sacrifice* to God, was truly such as could not fail to over-whelm his Mind with Horror and Confusion. Here was such Darkness, and mysterious Intricacy, as no Human Sagacity could see through. But yet, throughout all the

the previous Circumstances, it was evidently his Duty to obey, and still to persevere in his Obedience, as far as *his Light served him*, and to be all along wrestling with God, by importunate fervent Prayer, to afford him some Ray of clearer *Light*, by which he might be extricated from this perplexing Darkness. He was certain, that this very Circumstance of the Command, was from God: He was, at the same time, certain, that this *last* Circumstance of it, was a direct Contradiction to the infinitely Holy Nature of God: With Regard to all the other Circumstances previous to this, his own Mind might suggest Variety of Reasons, moving God to visit him with this hard *Trial*, tho' he could not discern all the Reasons of infinite Wisdom: For Example; he was a Man, and thereby liable to Human Infirmities; doubtless his Love was great to his Son; a Son, of whom the Divine Promises had given him just Reason to conceive a delightful Hope; he might think this *Trial* was designed to punish, or correct some Excess of Affection, which he had not himself discovered. But, as to this *last* Circumstance, of a *Human Sacrifice* to be offered by him; this was beyond all Human Understanding: And though his long Experience and Observation of the Divine Conduct, might well make him expect, that, in due Time, God would clear up the Matter to him; yet the terrible Severity of the pre-

previous Circumstances, afforded no small Ground to apprehend, this would end, in something yet more terrible ; for infinite Wisdom may order hard *Trials* in a great Variety, and in different Degrees, all of them consistent with his Holy Nature. And, doubtless, the Devil was incessantly assaulting the good Man, with his *fiery Darts*, while he observed him in a Difficulty, which he could never break through.

And, if a *Burnt Offering*, was in the Days of *Abraham*, considered as *Eucharistical*, as it certainly was, under the legal *Jewiſh* Dispensation, as instituted by *Moses* : The Incongruity of this was great, from the Joy and Gladness, with which the *Eucharistic* Thankfulness and Praises, were to be celebrated, compared with the mournful Situation of the Patriarch, in the Task and Obedience commanded. This was truly such an *Incongruity*, as could not fail to add to his Amazement and Confusion ; for how could Grief and Joy be blended together ?

When we consider the Complication of Difficulties, in which this good Man was involved, and survey them in our Mind, as they all along present themselves to our View ; but especially, as he was involved in the inextricable Labyrinth of this *last* Circumstance, now under Consideration, as it were

were to fill up the Cup of his *Trial*, viz. the offering up a *Human Sacrifice*; tho' we cannot have an adequate Sense of the overwhelming Perplexity and torturing Agony of Mind which he sustained, and in which he laboured during the Space of near three Days; yet the Impressions of it must be very strong, even upon our Imagination. The *Orcus* of the *mythic* Writers, may here receive some Explication. The Horror of the Darkness here actually infused into the Mind of *Abraham*, during the Time that his virtuous Soul was agitated and tossed under this Exercise, must have given his Soul such racking Pain, as comprehended some Degrees of the infernal Sufferings.

And, in this dark Perplexity, the only Ground left to *Abraham*, whereon to fix the Anchor of his Faith, was, his former long Experience of the Divine Care and Conduct, which never fails to watch over a piously resigned and faithful Soul; and the Divine Promise to him, *fear not Abraham, I am thy Shield, I am with thee, I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee.* And from this, he might well be looking for some *Light*, to direct his troubled Mind, through this dark Labyrinth; how to avoid the two Rocks, of disobeying the Command of God, on the one Hand; and the offering an *Affront* and *Indignity*, to his Holy Nature, on the other. And when
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the critical Minute approached, he needed an Angel to comfort him: And then God, who *is faithful*, and never suffereth those who sincerely serve him, *to be tempted above what they are able*, but *will, in every Temptation, afford a Way of Escape*, dispatched an Angel, *who called unto him out of Heaven, Abraham, Abraham, &c.* And now, instead of dismal Darkness, he had *Light*, a clearing *Light* of solacing Comfort, to dissipate all his perplexing Anxieties, and display the Beauty and Wisdom of the Divine Conduct in all he had suffered; and to give a fruitful *Lesson of the Victory of Faith*, and the Assurance of the Divine Love and Care, amidst all the *Trials* of the Faithful and Obedient.

And now, to wind up our Enquiry into this last mentioned Particular, which is, by far the most intricate Circumstance of *Abraham's Trial*: It is manifest, *first*, that the Way I have taken to clear it up, gives a stronger *Idea* of the Difficulties which the Patriarch had to encounter; and, indeed, the Words which introduce the Relation of it, do plainly insinuate a Scene of Temptation, or *Trial*, scarcely to be equalled; and thereby *Abraham*, the Father of the Faithful, is rendered a brighter and more glorious Pattern and Example to Mankind.

2dly, It is no less manifest, that this Representation of *Abraham*, as still in the Dark, and never satisfied in his own Conscience, with regard to the *offering up of a Human Sacrifice*; as also, that it was never God's *Intention*, that such a Sacrifice should be offered: I say, it is manifest, that this Representation, doth clearly carry off every Objection that can be moved, either against the Equity and Holiness of God, or the Innocency of *Abraham's* Conduct, so far as relates to this intricate Point; and this too, in a rational Way, so as to leave no Place for Cavil: And tho' it is the *only Way* of removing this knotty Difficulty, that entirely satisfies my own Mind, yet I am far from affirming, that no *other Way* is to be found. And, if what I have suggested, may help to ease the Mind of any sincere Soul, labouring under Anxiety, with Regard to this Circumstance of *Abraham's Trial*, the Labour I have taken to suggest it, will not be in vain, seeing this hath not, so far as it occurs to my Knowledge, been hinted by any other.

And tho' I think the Reasoning I have used, proves that this State of Darkness, was truly the Case of *Abraham*; and that his Conscience was never satisfied, as to the *offer-*

ffering of a Human Sacrifice : Yet I have declined the Benefit of this Proof, and have contented myself, with representing it only as a *Supposition* of a Thing in itself *possible*; or, at most, as a *probable Hypothesis*, because I needed no more : For, if this be considered, only, as a Thing *possible*, it is obvious, that all Difficulties immediately disappear.

If *Deists* will but candidly weigh what is here pleaded, it may have its Influence ; but if they are perversely bent to fix Absurdities upon the Holy Bible, in Opposition to the clearest Evidence, it will prove a Task too hard for all their conceited Wit and Subtilty. But, in the mean time, *Christians* ought not to be amused, and far less to stumble, and be disturbed, if some Intricacies occur in the Holy Scriptures, which are not yet cleared up, by all the painful and laudable Labour of the Learned. Such Difficulties are left in Obscurity, to excite and whet our humble and modest Industry ; and that fervent, importunate Prayer may be joined and concurring in all our laborious Enquiries ; we have thereby, Opportunity to observe the natural Blindness of our own Mind ; to be humbled in the due Conviction of this ; to long for that more perfect State, wherein what is now obscure and intricate, and only known in Part, and seen as

through a Glass darkly, shall be rendered beautifully clear and manifest ; whereas, now there is Opportunity given to be *increasing in Knowledge*, and to grow in *Understanding*, as well as in *Grace*. The clearing of some Obscurities may be reserved likewise, until such Turns of Divine Providence shall occur, as will render them both manifest and beautiful. This is the Importance of the *Jewish Saying*, *Wait until Elias come*. The Similitude used by an Ancient, is ; There are Depths in the Scriptures, where an Elephant may swim ; there are also therein Fords, where the Lamb may wade : Every thing which may render them a complete and perfect Rule of Faith and moral Duty, is therein, *and no where else*, so plainly set forth, that *he who runs may read it* ; *i. e.* every sincere and honest Mind, may easily observe and understand it.

I must not close this short Enquiry, until I have cleared up *two Objections*, which I easily foresee, may be offered, against what I have advanced in the *three* foregoing Sections.

§. 12. I have, in those Sections, represented *Abraham*, as never satisfied in his own Mind and Conscience, from the Beginning to the End of his *Trial*, with regard to *the offering*

fering of a Human Sacrifice; and yet, at the same time, considered him, as obliged to enter upon, and still to be persevering in his Obedience, throughout all the Stages and Circumstances previous to *such a Sacrifice*, with the same Care and Diligence, as if he had been convinced, that the actual Performance, even of that *Human Sacrifice*, was his Duty, and would be acceptable to God; *viz. so long, and so far, as his Light served him*; and withal, in the foregoing Sections, which treat of the *slaying an Innocent Person*, at God's Command, and even of a *Father's slaying his own Child*; I have represented the *Light* which *Abraham* enjoyed, as sufficient to render it his Duty, *so far to obey*.

I think, I have said enough, both to vindicate the Equity of God, and the Conduct of *Abraham*, relating to this Command, as given to a Father, to slay his innocent Son: And what I am now farther to add, will only relate to the *Human Sacrifice*, and the Representation I have given of the Patriarch as never satisfied in his own Mind, upon this Point.

When *Isaac* asked his Father (Verse 7.) *Where is the Lamb for the Burnt Offering?* The Answer made by *Abraham*, (Verse 13.) is

is most agreeable with our Sentiment, that the Patriarch was never eased of his Difficulty, with regard to the *Human Sacrifice*, but still looked for some Change of that Part of the Command, *viz.* *My Son, God will provide him a Lamb for the Burnt Offering*; and the *Ram caught by the Horns in the Thicket*, provided in the Event by God, to be the Subject of the Sacrifice, plainly concurs to favour my Sentiment, as a Testimony that God did approve of the hesitating Horror the good Man was under, and the Confidence he had, in due Time to be relieved, at least from this Part of his Difficulty, though he could not tell in what Manner, and had Cause to apprehend it would be a Manner very severe, from the exceeding Severity of what preceded.

I have said, there are *two Objections*, which I easily foresee, may be urged against what I have advanced, relating to this *Point* of the *Human Sacrifice*. And, as it is easy to urge them, I humbly conceive it is no less easy to answer them.

The first Objection is this; Was it possible to slay *Isaac* at God's Command, and to do it, even upon the Altar, without performing a *Human Sacrifice*? For, altho', it could not indeed, be a *Burnt Offering* until

til the Wood was kindled to burn and consume it; yet was not this enough to constitute a *Human Sacrifice*.

Before I give a direct Answer to this Question, I shall here briefly drop a few Remarks, which will open my Way to it.

My first, is a small critical Remark, *viz.* that the *Hebrew* Preposition *by* *Gnal*, which, in our Translation, is rendered *On*, (*laid him on the Altar*) may signify, not only *super*, *i. e.* *On* or *Above*; but also *juxta*, *apud*, *prope*; *i. e.* *Beside*, *Near*, or *Over-against*; and withal, it must necessarily be so rendered in many Texts of the Old Testament, even in the Books of *Moses*. *Pagninus*, in his *Thesaurus*, agrees this to be the genuine Signification of that *Hebrew* Particle, though in his interlineary Version, he follows the Sense of the Vulgar *Latin*, the Bible of his own (the *Romish*) Church; in this agreeing with our Translation, *viz.* *super altare, desuper Ligna; on the Altar, upon the Wood*.

In like Manner, the *Greek* Preposition *επι*, by which the *Septuagint* Version here renders the *Hebrew* *by* *Gnal*, may, and doth properly signify *Adversus*, *i. e.* *Towards*, or *Over-against*, especially when it governs the *Accusative Case*: So that the Place might well be rendered, *and laid him beside, (or Towards,*

wards, or *Over-against*) the *Altar*; as if the Wood had been laid in such Order, near the Altar, as the Body being laid upon it, might the more conveniently be slain, and dressed for being sacrificed upon the Altar.

This Rendering, seems to be favoured by an Observation, which is very obvious, *viz.* that nothing can be more evident, than that the *Animal* to be sacrificed, of whatever Kind, was, by the *Jewish Law*, expressly ordered, before it could be *laid on the Altar*, to be slain; the Blood and Entrails disposed of, according to the Rules given; and to be also flay'd, and divided into its Parts, &c. and all this to be done, *before it was laid on the Altar*. All this, is so manifest, that it would be an Abuse of Time and Labour, to refer to the Texts relating to it; whereas, in Contradiction to this Practice, the View that our Translation gives, represents *Abraham* as going to slay *Isaac* upon the Altar.

Now, as the slaying *upon the Altar*, was directly against the *Jewish Law*, given by the same God, who first instituted Sacrifices: So, in the Book of *Genesis*, and before the Law given, there is not the least Insinuation of any such Practice, as may favour such an Interpretation of this Text, as implies the *slaying on the Altar*; and it will not be easy

to

to find any plain and certain Examples of it, even among the Pagan Nations, ancient or modern.

If it should be said, that our Translation is confirmed by the New Testament, *viz.* Jam. ii. 21. *Was not Abraham, our Father, justified by Works, when he offered Isaac his Son, upon the Altar?* I answer, that as Isaac was not actually sacrificed, and this Text must therefore be so explained, as may consist with the true Fact; so the original Greek, in St. James, is likewise ἐπί, as well as here in Gen. xxii. 9. according to the *Sep- tuagint*, and governing the same *Accusative* Case, ἐπὶ τῷ θυσιαστηποι, in both Places, and therefore may, both of them, receive the same Interpretation, *viz.* *Beside or Towards the Altar.* It is evident, that the Words may bear the Exposition I have suggested; and if I have plainly enough represented this critical Remark, it is no less obvious, that it entirely takes off the Edge and Force of the proposed Objection.

My second Remark is, that, from some of the *Jewish Rabbinical* Authors, a groundless Notion hath arisen, as if all the Circumstances instituted by the Law of *Moses*, which were previous to the final sacrificing, were to be considered as so many constitu-

ent inseparable Parts of one and the same continued Sacrifice, consisting of such a *Series* and Course of Rites, until the Sacrifice was compleated ; *viz.* from the first presenting of the Subject at the Door of the Tabernacle, and ~~after~~ the Building of the Temple, from the first presenting it at the Entry of the first Court thereof, where an Altar stood, and so on, throughout all the Slaying, Eviscerating, Cleansing, Disposing of the Blood, Flaying, Dividing into Parts, &c. according to the Rules and Rites specially instituted and prescribed : And from this, they would infer, that a *Human Sacrifice* was not only begun, but far proceeded in by *Abraham*, before he *stretched out his Hand to take the Knife*.

Now, though there were some Pretence for this imaginary Notion, that all the ceremonial Rites, instituted by *Moses*, relating to Sacrifices, were, after such Institution, accounted as inseparable Parts of the complete Sacrifice ; because those Rites were then all of Divine Institution ; yet this Divine Institution, could not take Place in the Days of *Abraham*, who lived more than four Hundred Years before it ; and, therefore, even admitting this imaginary Notion, yet the Consequence would not be good, with respect to *Abraham* ; *viz.* so long before those Rites were instituted.

But,

But, that this Notion is altogether groundless, is evident from this ; that among the *Jews*, the *Morning* and *Evening Sacrifices* had the precise Hours for offering them, expressly prescribed. And hence we read so often in the Old Testament, of *the Time of offering the Evening Sacrifice*. Now, the long Train of Rites, from the first presenting of the Subject to be offered at the Entry into the Temple, the Slaying, Disposing of the Blood, Eviscerating, Cleansing, Flaying, Dividing into the Parts, &c. all of them prescribed, (especially on the *Sabbath*, when the Offerings were doubled) did necessarily require a considerable Time, and sometimes hard Labour, in order to have the Subject prepared to the Hour appointed ; more especially still, if there were to be at the same time, *Free-Will Offerings*, *Peace-Offerings*, *Sin-Offerings*, *Trespass-Offerings*, &c. and these were, likewise, multiplied on the solemn Festivals ; and yet, in Contradistinction from all these ^{pre}vious Rites and laborious Preparations, *the appointed Hour is called the Time of offering the Evening Sacrifice* ; which plainly denotes, that the *offering the Sacrifice*, did fall under a separate Consideration, as altogether distinct from all the previous Train of Rites and Preparations.

And this is further confirmed, by the Words of our Saviour, (who certainly knew

the Jewish Worship) Mat. v. 23, 24, *If thou bring thy Gift to the Altar, and there rememb'rest that thy Brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy Gift before the Altar, and go thy Way, first, be reconciled to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy Gift.* Doth not all this render it manifest, that the *Offering of the Sacrifice* was altogether distinct from all the previous Labour, Rites and Circumstances whatsoever, that were preparatory to the Sacrificing, even under the *Mosaic Law*? And if so, what could render them *inseparable* in the Days of *Abraham*?

Having premised these two Remarks, I proceed to answer the Question, in which the Objection is laid, *directly*. And,

First, the *critical* Remark subverts the very Foundation of the Question. If *Isaac* was not actually laid *upon* the Altar, but upon the Wood that had been laid *beside*, *near*, *towards*, or *over-against* it, then, it is obvious, that the Argument, drawn from the being laid *upon* the Altar, doth vanish.

Again; *2dly*, The other Remark, plainly leads us to distinguish between the *offering the Sacrifice*, and all that is previous thereto. That *Slaying*, is not *Sacrificing*, especially, if the Intention is not to do *Sacrifice*, is, in itself, evident.

Where-

Where-ever Sacrifices have been really performed, there was not only the Intention to Sacrifice, concurring with the *Slaying*; but likewise, such Prayers, and suitable Acts of Worship attending the outward Performance, as did testify and express the *Intention*. But none will pretend to shew us, in this Chapter, any such Concurrence in this Case of *Abraham* under View.

When *Joab* fled to the Tabernacle for Safety, as a Sanctuary, and *had taken hold of the Horns of the Altar*, (1 Kings ii.) *Bena-jah* did there slay him, at the Command of *Solomon*. And, in like manner, *Zacharias, the Son of Barachias, was slain between the Temple and the Altar*; (Matt. xxiii. 35.) But, in neither of these Cases, was there any *Sacrifice* performed; no, nor would it have been *Sacrificing*, if both the one, and the other of them, had been *slain upon the Altar*; because there was neither *Intention* to do *Sacrifice*, nor such Prayers and suitable Worship, concurring with the *Slaying*, as did always attend the *Sacrifices*, whether *Expiatory* or *Eucharistical*. The *laying on the Altar*, nay, the *slaying upon it*, might have been, without proceeding to do *Sacrifice*, as well as in our *Communion Office*, the Priest and People, may,

may proceed until the *Nicene Creed* is rehearsed, when the *Sacrament* is not to be celebrated ; a Practice very familiar.

Again, it cannot be denied, that it was possible for God, if it had so pleased him, to have commanded *Abraham* to slay his Son *Isaac*, even upon the Altar ; and, at the same time to have added a *Prohibition* to do *Sacrifice* thereby : And the Possibility of this, testifies, that the Slaying, even upon the Altar, doth not, of itself, necessarily render it a *Sacrifice*, without the Concurrence of the *Intention*, and a suitable Worship. In this Command of *Trial*, given to *Abraham*, God, who perfectly knew the Integrity of his Servant, and his Knowledge to discern what was agreeable, and what odious to his own infinitely pure and holy Nature, did not find it needful, to add the *Prohibition to do Human Sacrifice* : But, rather on the contrary, to heighten the *Trial*, made Semblance, by the Words he uttered, as if a *Burnt-Offering* of *Isaac*, were to follow, whereas the Event sheweth, that this was far from God's *Intention*. And so *Abraham* might well receive the Divine Approbation, without being at all convinced, or satisfied in his own Mind, that the Offering of the *Human Sacrifice*, could be acceptable to God ; or that it could be God's *Intention* ; nay,

nay, to have concluded otherwise, would have been an Affront and Indignity to God ; and, therefore could not admit of the Divine Approbation. I think thus much may suffice, for removing the first Objection.

I now proceed to the other, which, I think, is the only Difficulty relating to this Subject, that now remains to be cleared.

§. 13. In treating of the Offering up a *Human Sacrifice* unto the Holy and Merciful God ; I have justly represented that inhuman Practice, as an Abomination to him. And this naturally suggests the only Question that now remains to be cleared, relating to this intricate Subject, *viz.*

How can this consist with the Christian Doctrine of the great propitiatory Sacrifice offered unto God by the Mediator *Jesus Christ*, for the Redemption of Mankind ? Was not this a *Human Sacrifice* ? And was it not highly acceptable to God ? Is it not the great Foundation of all the Assurance Sinners can have, of Peace and Reconciliation with God ? Was not our Saviour himself a Man ? And did not he become a Sacrifice ?

This

This is one of the great Arguments, by which the *Socinians*, and others, who join in their System, endeavour to fix an Absurdity upon the Common Faith of Christians relating to the Satisfaction made to the Divine Justice, by the Death and Sufferings of our Saviour. And the *Deists* urge the same Argument against the Orthodox Christians, as an Absurdity upon the Divine Revelation in General.

The designed Brevity of that *fair Reasoning upon the Case of Abraham commanded to offer up Isaac*, which I have undertaken, as my only present Province, doth not allow me here to descend into any full and accurate Dissertation upon the Controversy concerning the Satisfaction made for Sinners by our Saviour. I am only here to defend what I have advanced, for clearing the *Case of Abraham and Isaac*, from all Absurdity ; and therefore I shall be fully acquitted of all that is incumbent on me, if I can plainly shew, that there is no Inconsistency in the Doctrine commonly received by Christians, concerning the propitiatory Sacrifice of our Saviour, on the one Hand, and the Representation I have given on the other Hand, of the monstrous Practice of a *Victima humana*,

mana, a *Human Sacrifice*, as an Abomination unto God: And that I may do this the more clearly and effectually,

I begin with an Observation, *viz.* That the most Learned of the *Socinians* themselves, do not only own it to be no Absurdity, but to be highly congruous, that *Jesus Christ*, as the great Prophet, sent by God, to give a new Law for reforming Mankind, and to be an illustrious Example of Patience, Resignation, and all other Virtues, should be persecuted like a Prophet; and, at length, suffer a painful and ignominious Death, by the Hands of cruel Men, to seal his Doctrine with his Blood; and that after his remaining under the Power of Death for some Space, he should (as he did) arise again to Life, and thereby give the strongest Evidence of his Divine Mission, as the Messiah promised, with such a Confirmation of the Truth of the Religion he hath instituted, as cannot be resisted; and that thereby all the Types and Prophecies relating to him, were fulfilled. All this they own.

Where then is the Absurdity ; or where the Incongruity ; if this great Prophet, the Innocent and Holy *Jesus*, did consecrate and offer up to his Heavenly Fa-

ther himself, and all his Sufferings, *with Supplications, strong Crying and Tears* (Heb. v. 7.) to be accepted as a propitiatory Sacrifice for the whole World of Sinners, and even for those who crucified him?

To illustrate this, in some Degree, tho' no other Example can be brought that is equal to it;

If any Martyr, Prophet or Apostle; if all the Martyrs who suffered Torments and Death, for professing and adhering to the Truth, did thus, in their last Moments, not only pray for their Persecutors, but offer up themselves, and all their Sufferings, to God, with fervent Supplications, not only that they might be thoroughly purified in the Furnace of their Afflictions, by the Baptism in their own Blood, but also that their Death and Sufferings might be for the Glory of God, and the Good of his Church (by *the Furtherence of the Gospel*) as the only Sacrifice then left in their Power to offer; and all this, for the Sake and Mediation of their Saviour; where is the Absurdity? Could this fail to be acceptable to him, who *puts their Tears in his Bottle*; and had said, *the Death of his Saints is precious in his Sight*? Was not this a dying Sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto

to God, and a *reasonable Service*? Only with this Difference, that they were not placed in the *vicarious Stead* of Mankind, and that there was no Merit of Condignity in ^{it} to go for the Redemption, either of themselves, or of others, because, *when we have done all that we can do, we are but unprofitable Servants*. The Circumstance of Merit, with Regard to our Saviour's Death and Sufferings, is altogether upon another Footing: Tho' he suffered only in his Human Nature, his Soul and his Body; yet the Person who did suffer, was God as well as Man. It was this that rendered the Sacrifice propitiatory, that gave the Merit to his precious Blood and Sufferings.

It was necessary, that an Expiation and Atonement should be made, to satisfy the Divine Justice, and to vindicate the Honour and Authority of the Divine Law. And infinite Wisdom and Mercy did contrive to effectuate this, in a Way that equally testifies God's Hatred of Sin, and his Pity of Sinners, by substituting his own dear Son in the Place of Sinners, to suffer the Death they deserved. And the Merit of the Person so suffering, is accepted for Atonement. And it is from the condescending Goodness of God, in the

Covenant of Redemption, that the temporal Death and Sufferings of the Redeemer, doth rescue Sinners from Death eternal, upon their performing the Conditions stipulated. And, in this Way, contrived by infinite Wisdom and Goodness, the meritorious Sacrifice of the Redeemer is accepted and effectual. This is the plain Doctrine of Christianity, the Substance and Abridgment of the common Faith of Christians upon this great Article, strip'd of all Scholastick Obscurity : And, as it is the great Foundation of the Assurance of Peace and Reconciliation with God, which no other System, but this of Christianity, can afford, so there is no Absurdity in it.

But was not this a *Human Sacrifice* ; and yet accepted ? I answer, that it was not, strictly and properly, *Victima humana*, a *Human Sacrifice*, in the Sense wherein that Expression is used and understood by Mankind, but as truly different from it, as the East is from the West. The immoral, savage Part, was altogether acted by cruel Blood-thirsty Men, who had neither Command nor Intention to do Sacrifice. The only Offerer of the Sacrifice was the Holy *Jesus* in his priestly Office,

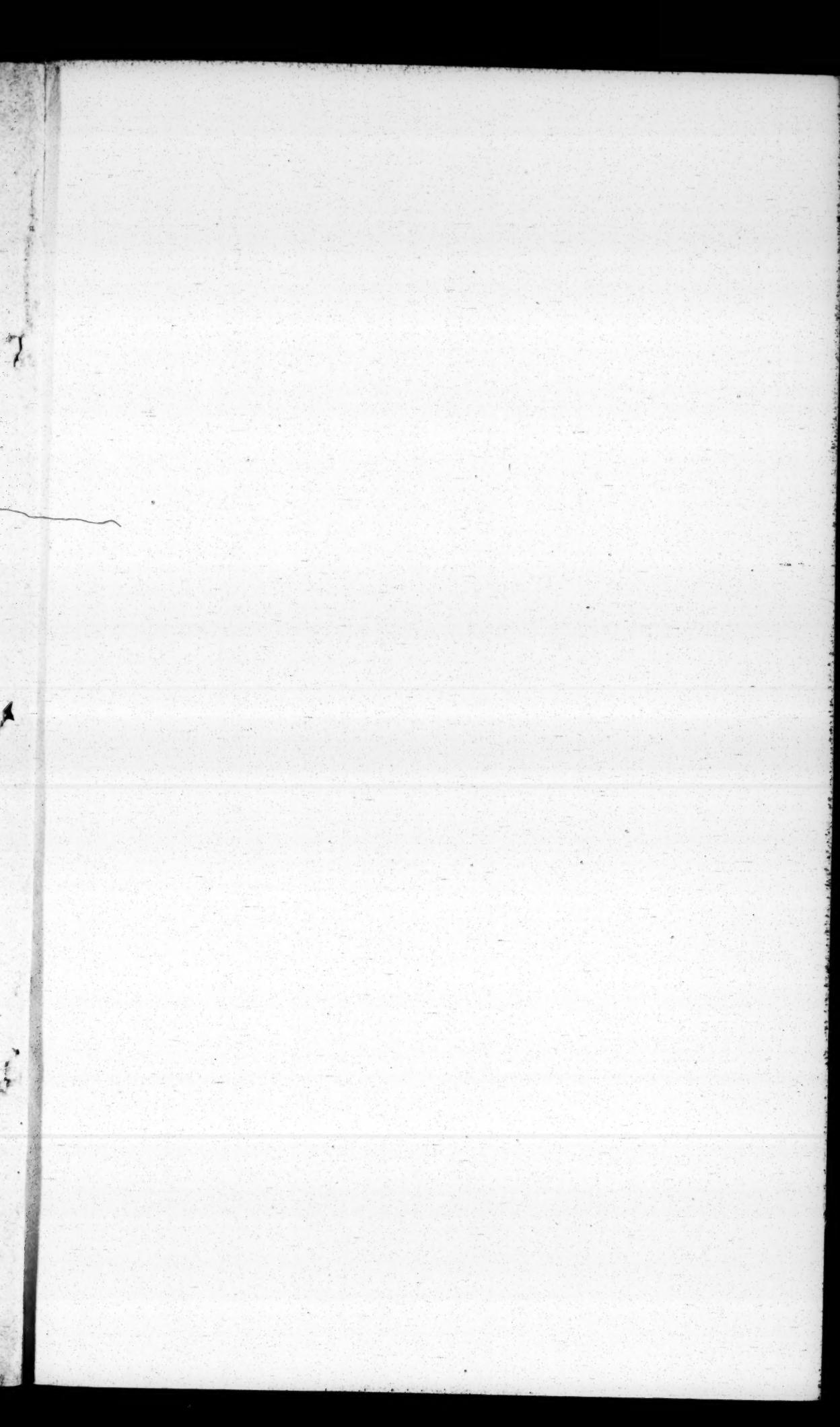
fice, as he was himself the Offering ; *the Lamb of God without Spot and Blemish*, that was offered to take away the Sins of the World. He was neither offered unto God in Sacrifice by sinful Men, nor did he act a violent Part upon his own Life ; an inhuman, barbarous Wickedness that now our modern *Deists* practise, and pretend to justify. He only willingly submitted to the spiteful Rage and Violence of those who took his Life, tho' he could have called for *Legions of Angels* to his Rescue. It was to this End, that he was sent into the World, that he might become our Saviour, deliver us from the Bondage of our Spiritual Enemies, and restore us into a Capacity of Salvation : And he did willingly undergo the Pains of Death ; *God laid on him the Iniquities of us all*, and he did willingly drink the Cup that his Father gave him ; and thereby was both a Martyr and Redeemer.

But I must remember, that it is not my present Province, as I have said before, to treat of this *Great propitiatory Sacrifice*, either to establish or defend it, against *Socinians* or *Deists*. My Task is only to shew, that the Doctrine of Christianity relating to it, is no Ways inconsistent

sistent with this great Truth; viz. that a *Victima humana*, all *Human Sacrifices* offered by fallen Man unto God (as that Expression is used and understood by Mankind) is an Abomination to him. And this, I think, is sufficiently done; and to add more, would be altogether unnecessary.

F I N I S.





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